

critical digest

Vol. II No. 19

February 28, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y. Openings This Week

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep-Broadhurst, 3/2/50. Frederic March and Florence Eldridge star in a new comedy by Elaine Ryan. Story is based on the novel by Ludwig Bemelmans. Produced by Nancy Stern and George Nichols III, the show is staged by Hume Cronyn.

Quick Glance at New N.Y. Shows-digests on inside pages

Devil's Disciple-Royale, 2/21/50. Daily reviewers failed to review reopening of Aldrich, Myers and Fleischmann production of the Shaw comedy. Garland was the only critic to run a first night review; he backed up his former opinion that the show was one of the best in town. The play had previously received a solid "pro" vote from the critics when staged at the City Center.

The Bird Cage-Coronet, 2/22/50. Arthur Laurents new play starring Melvyn Douglas was panned by the majority of the daily critics. Pollock, Compass, thought the play was worth the visit, but the others didn't think the fine acting in a few scenes made up for a dull play.

Shows that Closed

The Enchanted-Lyceum, 1/18/50-2/25/50. Giraudoux-Valency play presented by David Lowe and Richard Davidson found the reviewers split on the eternal controversy of "fantasy". Those who like whimsy with their drama enjoyed the play, the direction and the acting. The others praised the music by Alex North, but couldn't find much else to recommend.

Alive and Kicking-Winter Garden, 1/17/50-2/25/50. Katzell and Golden production written by a score of writers was okayed by critics of Compass, Journal American, World Telegram and Sun and Morning Telegraph. But the others thought the big show was too tasteless and confused to give the playgoer a pleasant evening.

Magazine Reviewers Look At the New Plays-digests on inside pages

All You Need Is One Good Break-Mansfield, 2/20/50. Four more "con" reviews are added to the credit of the play which reopened. Critics of Variety, Billboard, Cue and New Yorker let loose with a bitter flow nominating the Manoff play as the worst of the season.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Shirley Booth and Sidney Blackmer continue to receive top listings in the new play by ex-drama critic William Inge. Critic from Time thought the play was neither good nor interesting. Critics from the trade journals and Newsweek praised sincerity of play as well as the fine acting.

The Innocents-Playhouse, 2/1/50. Clurman, New Republic, didn't share his colleagues enthusiasm over the adaptation of the James "Turn of the Screw" ghost story. Christian Science Monitor critic praised the play.

Arms and the Girl-46th St. Theatre, 2/2/50. George Jean Nathan just didn't like the Theatre Guild musical version of "Pursuit of Happiness". He didn't like the book the music, the acting or the humor. He did like Pearl Bailey.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Though Clurman, New Republic, thinks the audience has to do some of the work, he recommended the Rodgers and Hammerstein production.

Critique Capsules by N.Y. World Telegram and Sun's Hi Phillips

Happy Time. Life with Junior
The Cocktail Party. Two parts psychiatry, one part gin.
The Man Jeepers Creepers
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. Some En-Channing Evening

The Devil's Disciple

"Pro Reviews"

a. Times--Acted with great style by lively company, very fine theatre. Notable piece of work, every actor gives flick of distinction to every part. Second best comedy in town, other also by Shaw.

Atkinson.

c. News--GBS play is like one of Melton's old autos, just put it into running condition and it's as good as ever. Toots Shaw's play put into tiptop shape by company. All the parts are in fine working order.--Chapman.

e. Compass--No better show in town, liveliest thing now going on anywhere. Shaw has never been done in such high spirits. This is virtuoso acting at its most enjoyable best, exhilarating, thrilling, brilliant.--Pollock.

g. Journal American--Theatre with a capital T., more fun than a barrel of young monkeys trying to imitate GBS. Acted wonderfully.--Garland.

i. Newark News--Somewhat arch and studied vintage play received capable treatment by a good cast.--Field.

k. Women's Wear Daily--Not as good in play and production as Caesar and Cleopatra play and there is enough humor, wit and irony to warrant a visit.--Dash.

b. Herald Tribune--Rich revival, good performances in every scene. Production realizes full impact of author's sly, epigrammatic story. Evans is the mainstay of cast.--Barnes.

d. Mirror--Satisfactory production, but nothing to provoke ringing of bells. Should improve as players master their roles more surely. King is star of evening, Webster direction not her best. Coleman.

f. World Telegram and Sun--Ripples and bursts with humor, lends itself to broad playing, done with style, speed, respect and ingenuity with fine cast under brisk and understanding direction.--Hawkins.

h. Post--Completely beguiling melodramatic comedy and a joy to behold. An event sensible playgoers should not miss Wonderful to watch.--Watts.

j. Brooklyn Eagle--Handsome, vastly entertaining revival. Pleasure of cast is contagious. Performances are first rate fluent, ensemble spirit to the playing. Shaffer

Garland Revisits Devil's Disciple

The above digests were taken from the reviews of the original January 25, 1950 production of the Shaw comedy at the City Center. Though all of the critics urged that the production be moved downtown, only Robert Garland, Journal American, covered the opening night of the play at the Royale Theatre. He is still convinced the play, produced by Messrs. Aldrich, Myers and Fleischmann, remains a necessity for every intelligent playgoer to see.

French Critics Form Film Society

Group of French critics, claiming "neglect of exceptional films" have banded together to form an Experimental Cinema Theatre. They expect to show the films they think are good, but lack commercial appeal, to a discriminating film public in Paris.

Winchell Checks Up On the Critics

"Critic D. Watts applauds Barry Norton (of The Rat Race) as the Young Actor Making Most Progress", reports Walter Winchell, Mirror. "If he's that crazy about him," Winchell continues, "he ought to know his name is not Norton but Nelson." Critic referred to was Richard Watts, Jr., Post.

The Bird Cage

a. Times--Con--Despite versatility of author's craftsmanship, play is a formula job. Does have several good acting scenes in the second act, with cast conspiring with author to make them effective. Clurman kept tale running briskly upstairs and down and flaring with bitter emotion. Remains pretty hackneyed stuff.-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune--So-So--Written with considerable eloquence and symbolism, performed in bravura fashion. A striking piece of showmanship. Has suspense and lurid theatrical excitement, but it does not add up to much of consequence in terms of allegory or meaning.-Barnes.

c. News--Con--Players well chosen, have been realistically and intelligently directed. Leads have their important scenes, which are individually exciting. But felt regrettable disappointment in the result. Individual scenes are not a substitute for a play and neither is revolving scenery.-Chapman.

d. Mirror--Con--Presents excellent cast staggering around in some exciting scenery in search of a good melodrama. Laurents remains a young dramatist of promise. Lacks the invention, novelty and zing of "Broadway". Lacks timing, motivation and heart of that classic. Probably reads better than it acts.-Coleman.

e. Compass-Pro--It is a play not quite like any other play, a play you will want to see. But it is hardly as effective as the author wanted it to be. The whole cast does well under Clurman direction, the setting is ingenious.-Pollock.

f. Post--Con--Vigorous, cluttered, rather exhausting melodrama. Despite some fine performances, author hardly makes his point with proper effectiveness. Never commits sin of being boring. Staging adds to the feeling of excessive elaborateness. Performances are generally excellent. Play is chiefly sound and fury.-Watts.

g. World Telegram and Sun--Con--Kind of play that seems always on verge of making some big moral point. Play filled with inhuman ordinary conversation. Its balance between vulgarity and wit is embarrassing. Has an awful lot of good acting in it.-
Hawkins.

h. Journal American--Con--It is dull enough to be a motion picture, it is as dull as "The Big Knife". Douglas is miscast and unbelievable. Best performance was by Stapleton. Others plod along to the best of their abilities.-Garland.

i. Brooklyn Eagle--Con--Incredible that Laurents name is attached. For a play filled with furor and melodramatic ruckus, it leaves the spectator surprisingly detached. He should try for a little simplicity.-Sheaffer.

j. Newark News--Con--Difficult to believe this lurid penny dreadful was not an adaptation of a Grade B cinema atrocity. The actors and the director can be absolved of most of the blame. Author wrote decidedly inferior product.-Field.

k. Women's Wear Daily--Con--All it lacks is a good play. Performers do yeoman duty in behalf of production, setting the kind of a great drama could have been enacted upon. Involved and episodic story not welded together.-Dash.

Coward Reads the Critics - Sometimes

Noel Coward, in New York for the opening of his current movie, "The Astonished Heart", confided to Tex McGray, Herald Tribune, that he doesn't read the reviews for months when the notices are bad. "But if they are good," he said, "I read them with great relish, agree with them wholeheartedly, and congratulate the critics on their good taste."

All You Need Is One Good Break

a. Variety--Con--In expanded form, it is merely stupefying. Individual performances among the commendable elements. But Berry fails to keep the interminable part from progressive monotony. Direction lacks variety.--Hobe

b. Billboard--Con--Sickly sister drama wise. A few character bits no matter how well projected don't make up for a superficial peek into the habits of a nitwit. It is not a play at all, it promises nothing and resolves nothing. Does have a good quota of entertaining moments from supporting roles.--Francis.

c. Cue--Con--One of the major mortifications of the year. Manoff's torment of talk and double talk. Directors do all they can for something which may just possibly have had a small shred of meaning once.--Gabriel.

d. New Yorker--Con--Author operates on principle that any discussion of the underprivileged is automatically interesting. Designer's mother may have well been alarmed by a kaleidoscope. Producer's decision to bring show to Broadway with paid help has a curious quality of pathos in its demented way.--Gibbs.

The Innocents

e. Christian Science Monitor--Pro--Brilliant production heightens the chilling ghost story. Superlative players recreate the mood of story in theatrical terms. Straight does an excellent job.--Braufort.

f. New Republic--Con--Begins interestingly enough, but deteriorates as it progresses, ends with unconvincing and maudlin moralism. Is well produced, with handsome setting. Director's meticulous British style does not always serve the cast well, though the cast is gifted.--Clurman.

Arms and the Girl

g. George Jean Nathan--Con--Book is over thickened, garrulous, and witless. Music the kind that refuses to go out the other ear, girls sort who issue from the local ballet schools. Staging mistakes silliness for humor and exertion for vivacity. Farray, Conte and Bailey give show lift, they don't have that extra something which might have given little more spirit to the proceedings.

The Happy Time

h. New Republic--Pro--Moral, family play with special latter day freedom about it. If one is willing to lend oneself a little, one will find it generally agreeable and frequently funny. Well acted and staged with certain amiably wicked cuteness that fits the material perfectly.--Clurman.

Morehouse Lists Top Acting of the Season

Lee Grant in "All You Need Is One Good Break", Dorothy Gish in "The Man", Leucan McGrath, Wesley Addy and Malcolm Keen in "The Enchanted", Katharine Hepburn and William Prince in "As You Like It", Beatrice Straight, Iris Mann and David Cole in "The Innocents" are on Ward Morehouse's all star list.

Gibbs Asks Why Poor Manuscripts Reach Broadway Production Stage

Wolcott Gibbs, New Yorker critic who is now busy preparing his short stories series on Fire Island for coming production, asks why apparently sane and adult investors continue to put their money in manuscripts that would be considered inept by a young reader of comic books. Though he has pondered this question for many years, Gibbs still doesn't have the vaguest idea, and he doubts very much whether God knows either.

Come Back, Little Sheba

e. Variety--Pro--Slight, but compassionate and impressively played drama. Booth shows again she is a gifted emotional actress, Blackmer gives an admirable performance in the explosive second act. A promising play writing start for an ex-critic, Ingc. Staged with careful detail and expressive pace.--Hobe.

b. Billboard--Pro--Curiously tenuous, yet honest little piece about a completely unimportant couple. Continuous interest in the compassionate telling of their dreary little story. Given a careful production, staging keeps it with proper commonplace focus. Two superb characterizations by leads, supporting roles have been uniformly well cast.--Francis.

c. Morning Telegraph--Pro--Two of the best performances available in the current theatre. Play has moments of power, but does not match the acting of the leads. Could forgive a much worse play with such good acting.--Bolton.

d. Newsweek--Pro--Though sincerity and skillful writing go long way toward compensating for the sketchy nature of the subdued drama, it is the really admirable performances of Booth and Blackmer that impart courage and a strangely touching quality to an otherwise drab play.

e. Time--Con--Tries hard to be honest, manages in places to be effective, contains a valiant acting team. But it is not a very good, or even a very interesting play. Too often with a dull pen, the author writes on tracing paper.

f. New Yorker--So-So--Many misgivings about the play which strikes me as a peculiar mixture of effective realism and psychiatric claptrap, I found no misgivings in performances by Booth and Blackmer. Sound contributions by rest of the cast.--Gibbs.

Key to N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance

Reviewers are rated as to how they like the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewer recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer did not state his preference directly.

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|------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (Star, PM) | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George Jean Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Sun (Merchouse) | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal American | 18. Variety | 28. Nation |
| 9. NY World Telegram and Sun | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

N.Y. Co Criticism At A Glance--see key on preceding page

Alive and Kicking-Winter Garden, 1/17/50. Pros: 5-8-9-17. Cons: 1-2-3-4-5-7-10-11-12-16-18-19-23-25-27-30. So-So: 14.

All You Need Is One Good Break-Mansfield, 2/9/50-2 11/50. Reopened 2/20/50. Cons: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-18-19-23-30.

Arms and the Girl-46th St. Theatre, 2/2/50. Pros: 3-4-5-10-11-12-14-19-23-24-30. Cons: 1-7-8-16-18. So-So: 2-6-9-26-27.

As You Like It-Cort, 1/26/50. Pros: 3-4-6-9-10-11-12-17-18-19-22-26-29. Cons: 1-2-23-24-27-30. So-So: 5-8-14-28.

The Bird Cage-Coronet, 2/22/50. Pros: 5. Cons: 1-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12. So-So: 2.

Caesar and Cleopatra-National, 12/21/49. Pros: 1-2-3-4-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-16-17-18-19-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30. Cons: 5-8-13. So-So: 8.

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pros: 3-5-6-7-8-12-15-19-20-23-27-30. Cons: 1-9-11-13-16-18-22-24-26-28-29. So-So: 2-4-10-14.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pros: 2-3-4-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-15-18-19-23-24-26-27-28. Cons: 1-9-14-22-25-29. So-So: 30.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pros: 1-5-8-9-10-11. Cons: 2-4-7-12.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pros: 28 votes. Cons: Nation. So-So: Time.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pros: 20 votes.

The Devil's Disciple, Royale, 2/21/50. Pros: 1-2-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12.

The Enchanted-Lyceum, 1/18/50. Pros: 4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-16-19-22-24-27. Cons: 1-2-17-18-23-26-28-29-30. So-So: 3-14.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pros: 1-2-3-4-5-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-20-24-26-29-30. Cons: 6-28. So-So: 16-19-22-23-27.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pros: 1-2-3-4-8-9-10-11-12-14-16-17-18-19-22-23-24-25-29. Cons: 5-6-7-26-27-28-30.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pros: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-24-25-26-28. Cons: 1-5-16-20-22-27-29-30.

The Innocents-Playhouse, 2/1/50. Pros: 1-3-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-22-23-24-26-27. Cons: 2-4-28-29-30.

Kiss Me Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pros: 28 votes. Cons: New Republic.

Lost In the Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pros: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Cons: 8-9-13-21-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27.

The Man-Fulton, 1/19/50. Pros: 2-4-8-10-11-14-15-23-26. Cons: 1-3-5-6-9-12-13-16-19-22-27-30. So-So: 7-17-18.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pros: 1-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-17-18-19-22-23-24-25-26-28. Cons: 16. So-So: 2-27-30.

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pros: 4-7-8-12-17-19. Cons: 1-2-18-20-22-23-25-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mr. Barry's Etchings-48th St. Theatre, 1/31/50. Cons: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-16-17-18-19-23-24-26-30. So-So: 9.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pros: 24 votes. Cons: 24. So-So: 13-16-17.

The Rat Race-Barrymore, 12/22/49. Cons: 22 votes. Pros: 4-15. So-So: 1-18-26.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pros: 18 votes. So-So: 23-27.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hollinger, 11/25/49. 3-6-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-22-24. Cons: 1-4-7-10-13-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27.

There's Charley-St. James, 10/11/48. Pros: 16 votes. Cons: 6-7-12-13-16-19-24-25-26-30. So-So: 4-27.

Touch and Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pros: 1-3-6-9-11-12-13-15-16-17-23-24-26-27-28-30. Cons: 2-4-5-7-14-18-19-20-22. So-So: 8-10-29.

